AL'S STORY

Passing on the Torch

Al Willstatter ***Betty LaDuke***

—AL'S STORY—

Passing on the Torch

ONCE AGAIN, KITCHEN TABLE TALK IN ASHLAND, OREGON BECAME REALITY. Joining Al and part of the Willstatter family (Al, son Kurt, and Kurt's daughter Lindsey) we ventured for the second time within one year (2014–2015) to Landsberg, Germany. Al was born there in 1925, and his childhood memories prevail. He often says "Once a Landsberger, always a Landsberger"—a town of endless charm and a painful history.

During the summer season, we once again enjoyed the kitchen table hospitality of Max Doll, Al's childhood friend of nine decades, and his wife, Marianne. They became my sketchbook subjects as we feasted on their garden bounty and home cooking, interspersed with many "prosits" of beer, wine and Bavarian crunchy salted pretzels. Simple pleasures! My sketchbook impressions and friendship renewals also extended to Cilla Jell and her family at Breitbrunn, a village bordering Chiemsee Lake.

The heart of Al's story is really two stories, his and Max's. From boyhood play friends and schoolmates, they each became soldiers on different continents; they could have killed each other, but didn't, and their friendship survived and evolved from the hell of war to the normalcy of peace, family, friends, meaningful work and community responsibilities. Surprisingly, in 1991, after 53 years of separation, they had an unusual, unexpected renewal of their friendship that now continues.

Al's attachment to roots became real for granddaughter Lindsey. At age 21, she is a nuclear vision research scholar and an avid rower. In Landsberg she experienced Al's childhood enjoyment of swimming in the Lech River. This has now become a family tradition!

Linsdey also experienced the charm of the Landsberg traditional environment (unscathed by war), the City Hall and surroundings that are many centuries old, the prison where Adolph Hitler was incarcerated and wrote Mein Kampf, the central Landsberg plaza, where Hitler gave one of his early speeches (that her grandfather witnessed), and the 2015 Children's Festival—an ongoing event of many centuries.

In the future, Germany will be more than a ski trip destination for Al's family. There will be much to ponder and enjoy.

Betty LaDuke—2015

—PRELUDE—

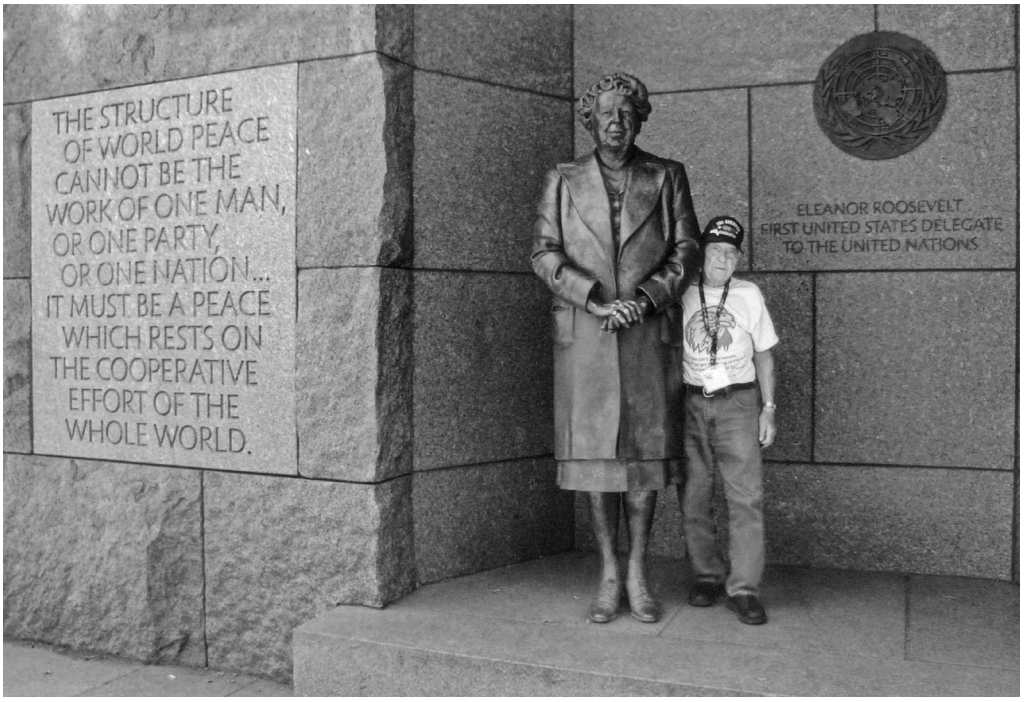
Receiving Appreciation as a World War II Veteran

AL, 1944 BASIC TRAINING—*Camp Roberts, California, the biggest infantry replacement center in the USA during World War II.*

I RELUCTANTLY ACCEPTED AN INVITATION to join Honor Flights Oregon (a privately funded organization that honors World War II veterans) and flew back with them to Washington, DC to view the WWII War Memorial. On July 20, 2015, twenty-six Oregon veterans, with assigned guardians (mostly family members), left Portland bound for the Capitol. There we were welcomed with bands and crowds of people cheering for us. After this raucous welcome, we proceeded to the Holiday Inn for more adulation and dinner. To my delight, my son Kurt, his wife Tracy, and my granddaughter Lindsey joined us. Kurt now became my official guardian for the complete Washington experience.

The main purpose of this tour was to view the WWII Memorial, erected to honor the veterans of that era. A bus was provided, and a police escort sped us to our other destinations that included the following: the Korean War Memorial, the Vietnam Memorial, the Iwo Jima Monument, the Arlington Cemetery, and the Roosevelt Monument.

I was most impressed with the simplicity of the Roosevelt Monument Complex, which was truly “a walk through history.” It featured models of the Tennessee Valley Authority, the Work Project Administration, the Civilian Administration Corps, statues of Eleanor Roosevelt, and even Roosevelt’s dog (Fellah, a Scottie). I just couldn’t resist posing with Eleanor towering over me.

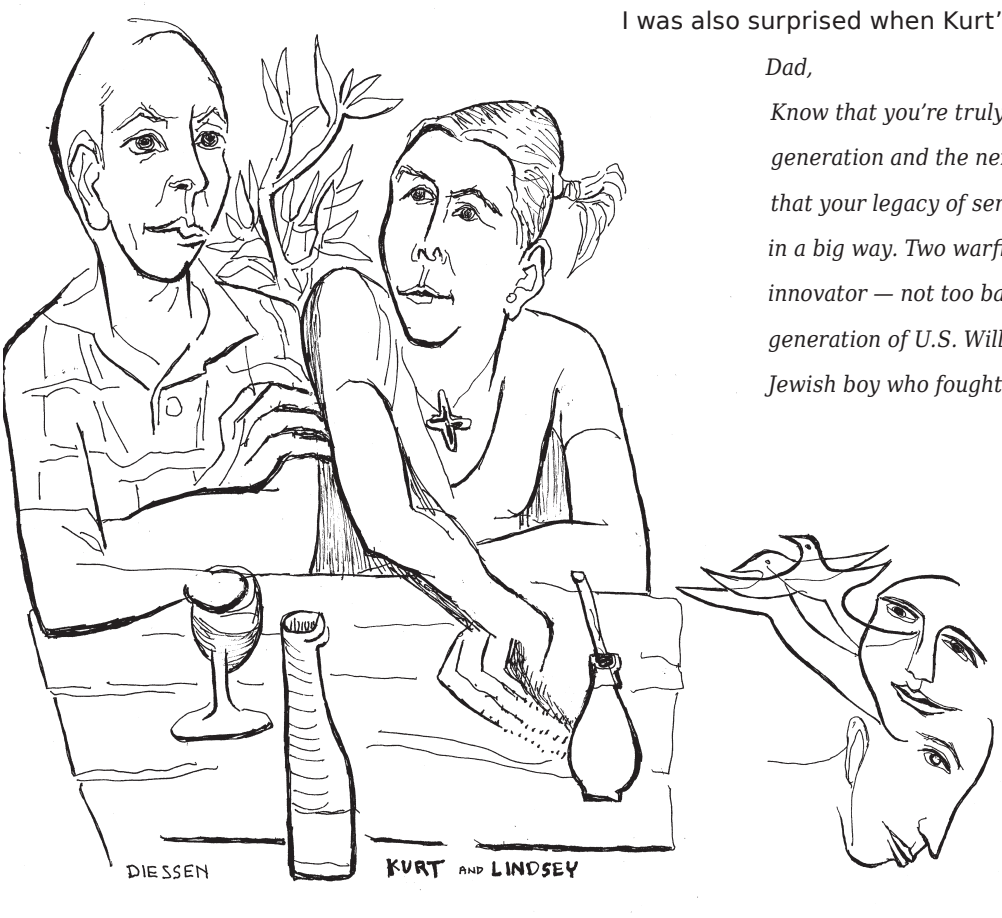


My greatest joys, however, were connecting with granddaughter Lindsey, now a young adult, and being surprised by Kurt’s letter—handed to me during “mail call.” Despite earlier trepidation, I was glad I participated.

AL & ELEANOR ROOSEVELT—*in Washington, DC at the Roosevelt Monument Complex.*

OVERSEAS, A WELCOME INTERLUDE WAS THE ARRIVAL OF MAIL from the States and its distribution to the troops, to us. Everybody was happy when they got mail.

In Washington, DC, we were honored with another mail call. My mail envelope included a letter from Oregon Governor Kate Brown thanking us for our years of service, and a copy of the resolution by Oregon Congressman Greg Walden, that all Oregon Veteran's names should be inserted in the Congressional Record.



I was also surprised when Kurt's letter was handed to me:

> *Dad,*
>
> *Know that you're truly an inspiration to both my generation and the next. My kids are proof positive that your legacy of service to country lives on in a big way. Two warfighters and a war-fighting innovator — not too bad a showing for the third generation of U.S. Willstatters. All from a displaced Jewish boy who fought for his adoptive homeland!*

Auf Wiedersehen ~ Till We Meet Again

After returning from this rather emotional experience, I received an invitation from my boyhood friend, Max Doll, inviting me to the 2015 Rhuetenfest (a children's festival celebrated every four years by reenacting Landsberg's early history). Having just been there less than a year ago in October 2014, I replied to Max with thanks and with doubts about a return visit.

Fortunately, granddaughter Lindsey expressed the desire to take advantage of the invitation, as she had the opportunity for a brief respite from her research, and Betty and I found the timing convenient. Kurt was delighted when I asked him to make the travel arrangements. July 14th found us winging it to Washington, spending the night and most of the next day there. The following evening, Kurt's wife, Tracy, took us to the airport—allowing three generations of Willstatters to explore and enjoy their roots. Betty's wonderful sketches captured the depths of relationships that have spanned a lifetime.

BEING ABLE TO VISIT AND RECOUNT PAST EXPERIENCES WITH THE DOLLS proved to be a highlight of the 2015 visit. Despite physical limitations, their sense of humor was in tact and kept them going. Max and I, after taking inventory of past acquaintances and schoolmates, concluded we were the “Last of the Mohicans,” having outlived our peers.

Marianne and Max, not having any offspring, enjoy their mutual interests and minimize their physical limitations by enjoying and constantly improving their natural surroundings, treating their vegetable and flower garden and fruit and nut trees like children. This was a source of their pride and nourishment, with the addition of Marianne’s kitchen prowess.

Despite our completely different experiences—mine global, Max's contained within Europe, the Russian war front, and then imprisoned in France—we shared many values, with our mutual observations pertaining to the adherence to ultra-Nationalism, and we agreed it is total lunacy!

Perhaps assuming responsibility for our individual actions, plus our lack of ego, made both of us survivors, regardless of circumstances. Max survived his political environment by being an astute observer and worker for the benefit of the entire community.

THE LAST WILLSTATTER FAMILY PICTURE IN LANDSBERG, GERMANY *taken prior to sending the boys to the United States and out of harms way—the ultimate sacrifice of parents. Fortunately, with the help of a number of Landsberger families (Doll, Jocher, Landersdorfer, Rahm, Maurer and Weishaupt) our parents escaped from Germany via Genoa, Italy, and reunited the family in St. Paul, Minnesota in 1940.*

POLITICAL CIRCUMSTANCES FORCED ME TO LEAVE and find a new life in my adopted country, while not forgetting, but always cherishing my roots. After being “Americanized” and schooled in the U.S., joining the military five years later to defend our way of life was like repaying a debt for my asylum. The thought of retribution for the horrors initiated by the Nazis’ Third Reich never entered my mind. I did what motivated me, without hatred or retribution in mind.

Despite the lack of contact with the Dolls from 1938 to 1991, the renewal of our mutual friendship led to a tighter bond than ever imagined. Max, in his native surroundings served his Landsberg community well as a city council member for 29 years. He retained his independence and refused any offers of personal gain. Continents apart, no matter where you go things are the same, as I experienced in the Ashland City Council from 1969—1972.

AL WITH HIS PARENTS, JANUARY 1944—*606 Dayton Avenue in St. Paul, shortly after his induction in to the United States Army at Fort Snelling in St. Paul, Minnesota, prior to shipment to Camp Roberts, California.*

The Ravings of a Lunatic (1929—1932)

HITLER AND HIS GANG OF NATIONAL SOCIALISTS were incarcerated in the Landsberg Prison for attempting to topple the German government. While imprisoned, he wrote the manifesto, Mein Kampf (My Battle), laying out his plans for the Third Reich. Unfortunately, it was not taken seriously, but considered the ravings of a lunatic. Hitler, Göring, Göbbels, Streicher, Himmler and their gang were considered "political prisoners" and received special treatment, unlike the criminal elements.

Heil Hitler! (1936)

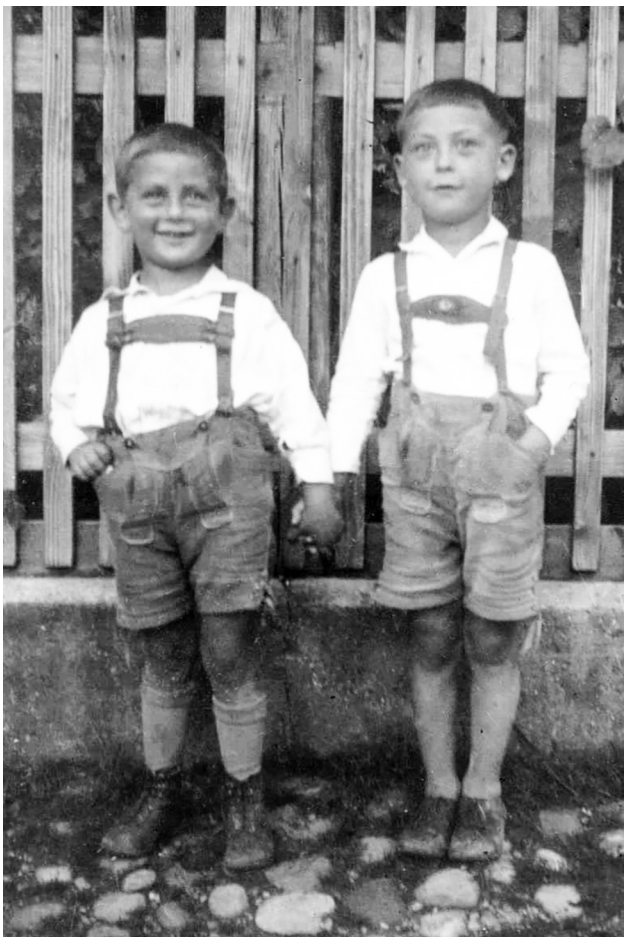
Prior to being ejected from school, I vividly remember being gathered, almost like a fire drill, and collectively marched from the school to the city square. There, we were part of a captive audience to adore our leader, Adolf Hitler. I'm sure that I followed directions at the time, and shouted "Heil Hitler" with a raised right arm, as instructed. At the age of six years old, I couldn't understand that having been born to parents who embraced the Jewish religion, our family was an enemy of the state and slated for extinction.

LANDSBERG PRISON—*Prior to the effect of Hitler's plan, no one took seriously the book Mein Kampf (My Battle), which he wrote while imprisoned in Landsberg. Hitler's vision of the Third Reich (Third Empire) was considered the work of a crackpot. History, unfortunately, repeats itself, since we don't seem to learn from the past.*

THE LECH RIVER LUSTILY TRAVELS THROUGH LANDSBERG, furnishing hydropower and wisely used irrigation. Many of Herb's (?) and my growing-up years found the river furnishing much of our simple pleasure, turning us into river rats. The Doll's beautiful home borders the river and is separated by a pedestrian/bicycle path. It was very pleasing to see my granddaughter, Lindsey and my son, Kurt finding relief from the heat wave by immersing their bodies in the refreshing coolness. The swimming genes were obviously passed on.

Life Before Fatherhood

It became very apparent that our offspring regard us only as parents, as if we were never young, and they know and relate to us in that parent capacity. Returning to my roots in the Landsberg environment with two succeeding generations, furnished answers to many questions about my boyhood. In Landsberg, entertainment was simple. The Lech River furnished all our recreational needs in the summer, and the steep banks above the river furnished physical activity for skiing and sledding in the winter. Life was less complicated, and human interrelationships were much deeper than in this current age of texting. Relationships were really valued and maintained, despite long and distant separations.

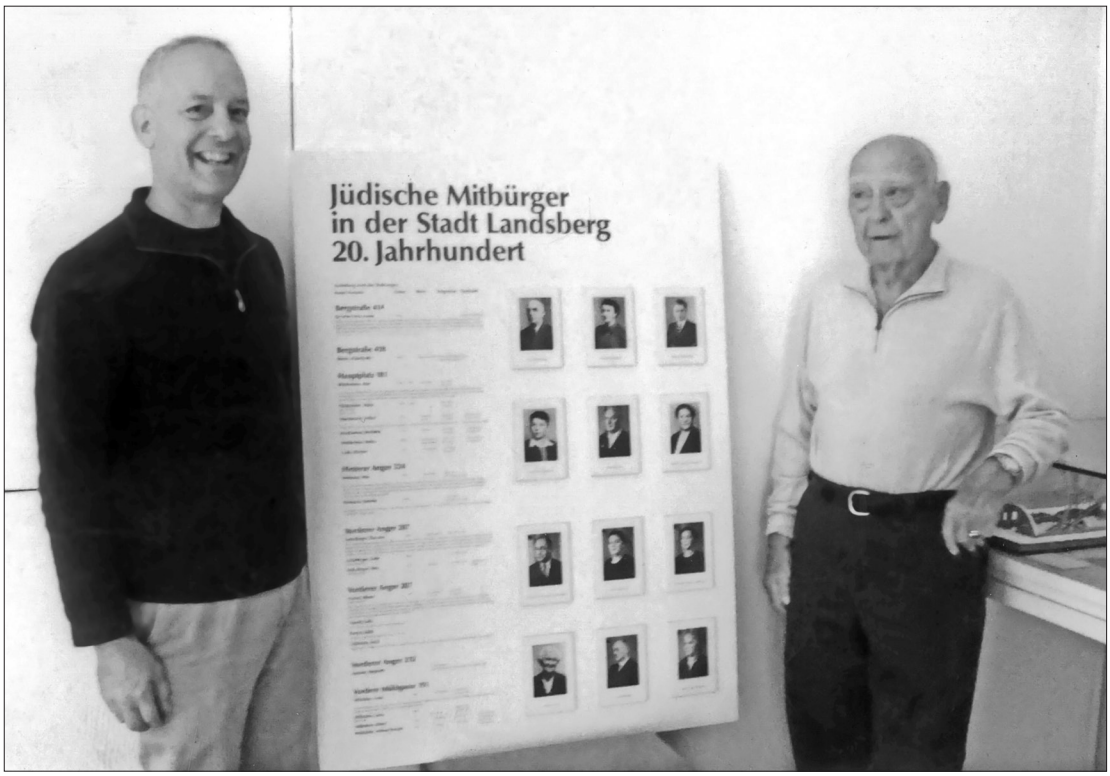


BROTHERS HELMUT & AL—*Young Landsbergers in Lederhosen.*

Lederhosen

While resurrecting and reminiscing our growing-up years, the practical and indestructible lederhosen entered our conversation. The thought of finding a pair for my youngest grandson, Erik gripped me. The search proved unfruitful. None of the stores carried them, since Western jeans were the vogue, and traditional shops were replaced by boutiques. Attempts to find used, well-seasoned family heirloom lederhosen yielded no results. Like the Model T Ford, the obsolescence of the lederhosen was inevitable.

UNFORTUNATELY, WE MISSED PERSONAL CONTACT WITH longtime Mayor of Landsberg, Franz Rössle, and his wife, Eva. But we are grateful for his efforts to secure tickets for the Ruethenfest activities, which were at a premium. Kurt and Lindsey thoroughly enjoyed the opening, as well as the many other activities that they attended. I am forever thankful to Franz, who, as longtime mayor of Landsberg, was responsible for including in the Landsberg Museum a section dealing with the Nazi history of driving seven Jewish families out of Landsberg. This period of history is not to be forgotten or repeated. Thanks again, Franz.



Kurt and Al with a historical display at the museum:
"Jewish Citizens in the City of Landsberg in the 20th Century"

After the sentimental trip to Landsberg in October of 2014, accompanied by Betty, son Kurt, and Kurt's wife Tracy, I felt that the torch of my roots had successfully passed on to the next generation. Because of age and related infirmities of lifetime friends, I did not anticipate a 2015 rerun. To my delight, granddaughter Lindsey proved to be the catalyst and motivation for a three-generation return visit. The 2015 Ruethenfest (Children's Festival) in Landsberg, the Doll's gracious invitation, and the right timing turned Kurt into our travel agent. Once believing it was a pipe dream, July 14th came quickly, and the "dream" became reality. We joined Kurt and Lindsey in Washington, DC, and we all winged it to Munich via Lufthansa .

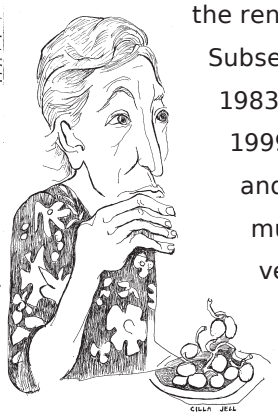
Despite encountering a record-breaking heat wave in Germany, the three-generation revisit was a delightful unexpected continuance of last year's sentimental visit. The Doll's gracious hospitality and the delightful stay at Haus Jell with Cilla and family at Chiemsee proved that true friendships last a lifetime. Thanks, Max, for the invitation that propelled Lindsey to stir me into action. Friendships and memories are irreplaceable.

Chiemsee–Jell Connection

IN 1946, AFTER THE CESSATION OF WWII COMBAT, I was in engaged in many different intelligence activities throughout Southern Germany. The last assignment brought me to Rosenheim, Bavaria, located about 20 km from Lake Chiemsee. My assignment was in a small intelligence unit consisting of seven individuals. Our primary task, in covering a six-county area, was to aid the current military government in reestablishing police departments and returning local governing bodies to civilian control. Additional tasks included monitoring displaced persons camps to seek out former concentration camp administrators and guards who sought cover and anonymity by taking advantage of the chaos of fleeing refugees. Many of those concentration camp employees we extracted, so that they ultimately faced their fate at the Nurnberg Trials for war crimes.

While stationed at Rosenheim, we made the acquaintance of Lily Schubert, the owner of a local beauty salon. We had many social contacts, and reciprocated by furnishing scarce food, with our friends supplying the delightful liquids—wine, cognac, etc., which flowed freely. Lily Schubert and her brother, Bruno retained a small weekend cabin at Breitbrunn, bordering Chiemsee Lake. Unfortunately, the cabin could not accommodate the weekend “invasion”, forcing us to look elsewhere.

The nearby Gasthaus Jell, which was just in its development stages, answered our needs. The establishment of that relationship continued until the present, including my Salzburg State Department assignment (1954–1956) and my son, Kurt’s summer internship in 1977, working for the Jells by rigging sailboats and maintaining the rental boats. Subsequent visits in 1983, 1986, 1991, 1999, 2008, 2014 and 2015 kept our mutual friendship very much alive.



Cilla Jell

Friendships and Memories Last a Lifetime

THE 2015 THREE-GENERATION WILLSTATTER VISIT gave Lindsey a personal attachment to the magical and magnetic attraction to Breitbrunn and Lake Chiemsee. This trip not only passed the torch to the next generation, it cemented a connection with the one beyond for the Willstatter and Jell families. This spontaneous trip was truly meant to be.

Marianne & Max Doll

Cilla Jell & Lindsey

Al, Marianne, Betty & Max

Lindsey & Kurt

Marianne, Lindsey & Max

Max & Betty

2015 Ruethenfest (Children's Festival) in Landsberg

Left to right—Al, Marianne, Max, Kurt & Lindsey

AL MAX MARIANNE